Global Leader Early Life Experiences

Common Factors among Foreign-Affiliated Company Leaders in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Most of the extant research on leader development has focused on development that takes place in adulthood, primarily through experience gained in the workplace, largely ignoring the development that occurs earlier in life. More recent studies have established leader development as an ongoing process that takes place across the entire lifespan, exploring early life factors such as genetics as well as environmental and contextual influences. The importance of experience in leader development is increasingly recognized. The purpose of this paper is to summarize initial findings from an ongoing study into key common early life and career experiences among Japanese general managers working at foreign-affiliated companies in Japan – defined as Japanese "global leaders" in our research. We conducted semi-structured interviews with nine global leaders, based on a modified framework for lifespan leader development developed by Liu et al. (2020), to explore important formative experiences which took place during Preschool, Childhood, Adolescence, Emerging Adulthood, and Early Adulthood. We derived four hypotheses based on an analysis of our interview data, which have important implications for Japanese youth aspiring to become global leaders in the future, as well as for companies in Japan seeking to develop and hire global leaders for their businesses.

INTRODUCTION

Given the increasingly competitive and complex world in which they now operate, corporations are investing into assessing, developing, and enhancing the capabilities and capacities of their leaders more than ever (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019), often with the help of external employee training and development firms representing a global industry estimated to be worth more than 370 billion U.S. dollars (Statista, 2019). At a senior executive level, leaders are charged with navigating their organizations through the increasingly VUCA[1] landscape that lies before them – not only in their home countries, but frequently further afield across regional and global markets. To successfully achieve this requires an ever-expansive domain of industry, specialist, and functional knowledge, as well as multi-cultural awareness, leadership effectiveness, and personal efficacy. Various leadership development interventions have been developed and implemented in the workplace aimed at supporting such leaders in acquiring and nurturing these necessary skills and attributes (Oddou & Mendenhall, 2008). However, research supporting the efficacy as well as outcomes of such leadership development interventions is limited (Lacerenza et al., 2017), with the variety of global leadership development programs implemented thus far showing poor results (Mendenhall, et al., 2008). Recent surveys indicate global company CEOs have doubts in general when it comes to the positive impact such efforts ultimately have on their organizations (Feser et al., 2017).

One factor limiting our understanding of the developmental pathways for successful business leaders is that the vast majority of the extant research focuses on leadership development that occurs later in life, typically in corporate or workplace settings (Liu et at., 2020). These studies neglect to take into account the individual leader development that occurs earlier on – particularly during childhood and adolescence (Murphy, 2011). Indeed, some leadership experts argue that "much of leadership talent is hardwired in people before they reach their early or mid-twenties" (Sorcher & Brant, 2002) – in other words, before they even enter the workplace. In

order to design effective and customized programs for developing executives, it can be argued that an understanding of the precursors to the individual's journey to becoming a leader, and the foundational experiences and processes they went through in order to get there, are essential in order to be able to effectively assign and tailor the right programs for the right people. Despite this, there exists a dearth of empirical research into the early life development of business leaders, and the key experiences and mechanisms through which individuals start to accumulate the foundational skills and capabilities necessary for leadership roles later on in life (Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

Research tells us that, while up to one third of the variance in leadership role occupancy can be accounted for by genetics, the far more significant remaining portion can be associated with the development of leader attributes and capabilities influenced by environment, context, critical experiences, and other life factors (Arvey, Rotundo, Johnson, Zhang, & McGue, 2006; Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, & Krueger, 2007) – a great deal of which takes place during the early stages of life, prior to emergence as a leader in adulthood (Day 2000; Day 2011; Castillo & Trinh, 2018; Day & Dragoni, 2015). This may be because aspects such as behavior, personality, and skills are more malleable – and thereby more readily developed – in childhood and adolescence than later on in life (Arnett, 2000; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Some of these foundational leadership skills may even be important to develop early on (Avolio & Vogelgesang, 2011; Gardner, 2011), even if the effects may only become observable during adulthood (Bornstein, 1989). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the steps which lead to one's development as a leader are self-reinforcing – in that, as one accumulates leadership experience, one becomes more confident in being a leader and more likely to engage in leadership activities (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008), as well as to be expected to do so by others (Eden, 1993). In other words, the cumulative effect is greater, the earlier leader development begins – as was concluded in a comparative study of leaders and non-leaders by Amit et al. (2009), which found that

individuals who emerged as leaders had more leadership experiences in their youth. Collectively, it would be reasonable to suggest that the development of an integrated framework to identify and assess for key experiences, environmental influences, and other contextual early life factors which converge to produce successful leadership outcomes in adulthood, would contribute significantly to the ability of corporations to better understand and support both future as well as existing leaders in their organizations.

When it comes to Japan, while considerable research has been conducted on Japanese business and management practices, studies on leadership and leader development have remained sparse (Fukushige & Spicer, 2007; Morinaga & Tateno, 2015), with almost no existing research focusing on "global leadership development" within a business context in Japan. This is despite Japan facing a unique and unprecedented need to develop more leaders capable of driving global business expansion in the face of various converging factors, including a rapidly aging society, a shrinking local workforce, a saturated domestic consumer market, and ever-increasing competition from companies overseas (Yonezawa, 2014). Furthermore, the research on leadership in the existing literature has focused exclusively on employees at Japanese companies in Japan or Japanese multinational companies overseas (Bozkurt, 2012), completely neglecting another "pool" of Japanese global business leaders: Japanese executives employed by foreign-affiliated companies in Japan.

Foreign-affiliated Companies in Japan

As of 2018 there were 3,287 foreign-affiliated firms in Japan employing 552,388 regular workers (METI[2], 2019), representing 0.74% of Japan's working age population of 75.072 million (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2019). Given the necessity for employees of foreign-affiliated companies in Japan to operate as part of a globally-integrated employee network, often working within Westernized corporate environments and business cultures, these firms typically

require a high level of English language ability, as well as a degree of experience of, and familiarity with, global cultures and styles of communication, when recruiting new staff. This is particularly true when it comes to hiring the most senior level leaders at these companies – "Japan General Managers," or "Japan Country Managers." Such leaders are expected to play a pivotal role facilitating communication between the Japan subsidiary and global management, ensuring key stakeholders are aligned on both sides, while also making sure the company's global corporate culture and values are understood, replicated, and instilled within all layers of the local Japan entity. In order to be able to achieve this, these leaders need to be extremely highly skilled in terms of understanding how global organizations function, how to communicate across complex international corporate structures, how global business decisions are made and how to influence such decisions, and how to actively maintain Japan's "seat at the table" as part of a multi-cultural global leadership team.

Arguably, Japan stands to learn a great deal about how globally-capable Japanese leaders are "made" by gaining a deeper understanding of the developmental pathways of top Japanese executives at foreign-affiliated companies in Japan. Furthermore, given the importance of the development that takes place early on in life (as mentioned above), through detailed examination of the early life experiences of these executives, we may be able to shed light on possible approaches that can be taken to encourage the holistic development of more global leaders in Japan, from an earlier stage in life prior to starting their professional careers. Lastly, there may be important implications for Japanese and foreign-affiliated companies when making key decisions on hiring global Japanese leaders into their organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the existing research into early life stage leader development reveals many studies which contribute to our understanding of the facets of leader development taking place during

this time, offering "snapshots" of how such development may start to take shape. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) examined the relationship between leader development during childhood and the family environment, proposing a positive correlation between roles performed in a family context (such as doing chores, looking after younger siblings, or caring for pets) and emergence later on as a leader. Other studies examine relationships between specific childhood attributes and emergence in leadership roles at the same point in time (e.g., Rechia, 2011) or leadership outcomes later on as an adult (Amit, Popper, Gal, Levy, & Lisak, 2009; Keller, 2003; Popper, 2011). Schneider et al. (1999, 2002) examined leadership behavior among adolescents and its relationship with predictive variables including personality, interests, motivation, and academic performance. Another study found correlations between transformational leadership behavior among parents and adolescents in high school sports teams (Zacharatos et al., 2000). Other research correlates certain personality traits such as dominance, extraversion, and social competence with leadership ratings by teachers or peers (Lease, Musgrove, & Axelrod, 2002; Recchia, 2011; Shin et al., 2004). Further studies focus on early life leader development among high school students (e.g., Schneider et al., 1999; Schneider, Erhart, & Erhart, 2002), university students (e.g., Komives, 2011; Sternberg, 2011), or military cadets (e.g., Bartone, Snook, Forsythe, Lewis, & Bullis, 2007), although not among business professionals.

Another body of research starts to provide us with a broader and longer-term view of how leaders are developed over time from early on in life through to emergence in leadership roles later on in adulthood. The Fullerton Longitudinal Study, an ongoing research program started in 1979, has found that a variety of factors in early life, such as extraversion, academic intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and positive family environment, are significant predictors of emergence as a leader in adulthood (Gottfried et al., 2011; Guerin et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2011; Reichard et al., 2011). A further group of researchers has started to explore leadership

development "across the lifespan" (Day, 2000; Day et al., 2009; Avolio & Vogelgesang, 2011; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Liu et al., 2020), significantly contributing to the overall literature by proposing theoretical frameworks for leader development starting from pre-school through to late adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Given that leader development is a dynamic process that varies across time and context (Castillo & Trinh, 2018; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Oc, 2018), this allows us to start connecting the dots between some of the interrelated contextual factors, environmental influences, and formative experiences which may be at play during the early life stages of executives prior to embarking on their professional careers, and which may be pivotal to their emergence in leadership roles later on in adulthood.

Murphy & Johnson (2011) constructed a dynamic model of leader development across the lifespan, proposing a theoretical framework that describes the ongoing interaction between early life developmental factors (early influences, parenting styles, and early learning experiences) and the development of leader identity and capacity for self-regulation, while taking into account moderating environmental and contextual considerations (societal expectations, time in history, and age), and the resulting influence on emergence in leadership roles and leadership effectiveness.

Liu et al. (2020) presented a framework (see figure 1) that explores leader development among business leaders during experiential windows at specific stages across the lifespan – from pre-school, childhood, and adolescence through to emerging adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood – positing that development can be influenced by the ongoing dynamic interaction between two systems - the leader's experience processing system, and the leader's self-view system. Leader development overall is moderated by foundational differences between each leader – i.e., genetic predisposition and certain foundational traits. For the purposes of this study, we have adapted Liu et al.'s framework to focus on key experiential windows during the early

life stages of leader development, from Preschool to Early Adulthood (see figure 2).
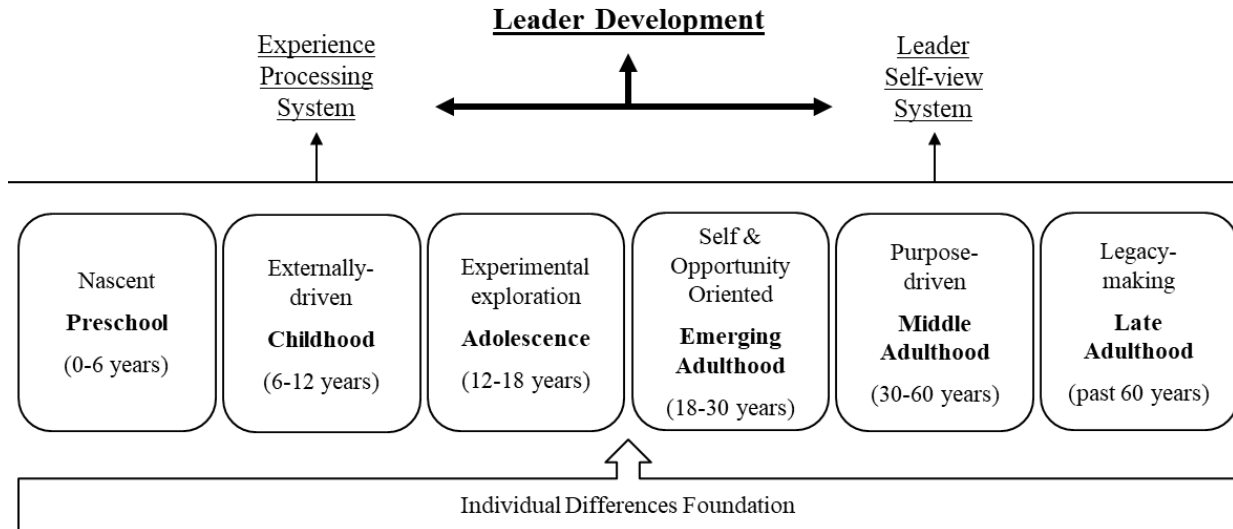

Figure 1.   Leader Development through Experimental Windows

Leader Development in Japan

While the success of Japanese companies and management practices became the subject of much research and discussion during the few decades following Japan's emergence as a significant economic power post-World War II, studies on leadership and leadership development in Japan have remained sparse (Fukushige & Spicer, 2007; Morinaga & Tateno, 2015). This is despite Japanese companies focusing increasingly on leadership development for their employees (Herbes & Goydke, 2016; Furuno, 2000).

The majority of extant studies on leadership development in Japan focus on exploring leadership behaviors and capabilities at Japanese companies. Misumi & Peterson (1985) developed the Performance-Maintenance (P-M) theory of leadership, which proposed two types of leadership behaviors critical to organizational success: performance behaviors (e.g., Planning, identifying reasons for poor performance, and giving direction) and maintenance behaviors (e.g.,

Trusting subordinates, being mindful of the personal situations of others, and acknowledging good performance). Several leadership invention programs were developed and evaluated based on Misumi's P-M theory, evaluated by Seki et al., 1992. Other studies focus on identifying and categorizing leadership capabilities. Shimizu (1995) proposed entrepreneurship, management, and leadership as key capabilities of top executives at Japanese companies. Niihara (2002) identified seven core capabilities as being critical to success, and Morinaga & Tateno (2015) explored leadership behaviors expected of employees by Japanese companies. Lastly, other studies have focused on the relationship between job experience and leadership skill development among employees at Japanese companies (e.g., Taniguchi, 2006).

Other research examines and discusses Japanese leadership within the context of the global leadership behavioral discourse. Hofstede's much quoted (1980, 2001) research into global leadership indicates that Japan is moderate on power distance and individualism, and high on masculinity and uncertainty avoidance when compared to leadership preferences in other cultures. Yokochi-Bryce (1989), on the other hand, found that Japanese leaders utilize a transformational style of leadership more frequently than transactional or laissez-faire styles. By contrast, Hayashi (1988) posited that the traditional Japanese leader practices "inconspicuous" leadership as opposed to the classic Western leader who leads "from the front of the orchestra." Ishikawa (2012) found that gatekeeping leadership was effective in enhancing innovative ideas among Japanese R&D teams, whereas transformational leadership had the opposite effect. Fukushige & Spicer (2007) explored the applicability of Bass and Avolio's (1997) full-range global leadership model in Japan, concluding that a new Japanese leadership model based on contemporary Japanese leaders' preferences should be developed. As such, there remains much to be discussed, and little of a conclusive nature in the existing literature, when it comes to the differences, as well as the similarities, between what successful leadership looks like in Japan compared to around the world.

When it comes to global leader (or leadership) development in Japan, the research becomes scarcer still. While several commentators have examined initiatives aimed at internationalizing the Japanese education system in order to produce more future global leaders (e.g., Hashimoto, 2005; Goodman, 2007; Yonezawa 2011; Yonezawa 2014; Kudo & Hashimoto, 2011), very few studies explore how successful global leaders are in fact developed. Graen & Hui (1999) conducted a longitudinal study which concluded that the eventual career progress of Japanese global leaders can be predicted by three behaviors observable during the first three years of their career: 1) Building effective working relationships characterized by trust, respect, and obligation with immediate supervisors; 2) Networking with contacts at prestigious universities; and 3) Performing beyond expectations in the face of difficult and ambiguous situations. Another study by Hirai & Suzuki (2016) examined core competencies and facilitating developmental factors among eight Japanese individuals with international backgrounds working in various capacities with non-profit, academic, and commercial entities in Japan and the US. The research, based on 90-minute interviews, found that self-management, relationship building, and intercultural competencies, as well as flexibility and resilience, are key to global leader development. While these studies are useful in terms of proposing some potential characteristics of global Japanese leaders, what constitutes a "global leader" is loosely defined, and the pathway to becoming a global leader is left largely up to the imagination.

This present study aims to expand the body of literature for global leader development in Japan, as well as leader development across the lifespan, by examining common early life and early career experiences of nine Japanese General Managers employed by foreign-affiliated companies in Japan.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study attempts to derive hypotheses with regards to common early life and

early career experiences among Japanese global leaders. For the purposes of this research, we define "global leader" as the most senior representative of a foreign-affiliated company or brand in Japan, i.e., Representative Director, Chief Executive Officer, Country Manager, or General Manager for Japan.

Research interviews were conducted with nine Japanese global leaders. The interviews focused on gaining insights into the early life stages of interviewees, from their preschool years to their mid-thirties, by which point they had completed the foundational period of their professional careers.

In order to design the interview structure for this research, one of the co-authors of this paper, a specialist in leadership assessment, first interviewed the other co-author, who can be categorized as a global leader as defined in this paper, on February 2, 2020. The data from this interview has been included in this research. In terms of gathering additional interview participants for our study, we approached a wide variety of executives from differing professional backgrounds and diverse industries including sports & fitness, consumer packaged goods, retail, luxury, and technology & online, in order to present as wide a representation of our sample target population as possible.

The interview data for this study is currently being expanded to include additional Japanese global leaders. This paper attempts to summarize our initial study findings during this early stage of research.

Analytical Framework: Leader Development through Experiential Windows

We developed an analytical framework for leader development based on experiential "windows" (stages) during the lifespan ranging from an individual's nascent years through to early adulthood, adapted from research done by Liu, et al. (2020), which is shown in Figure 2. Each stage, characterized by specific critical formative experiences, serves as a window of

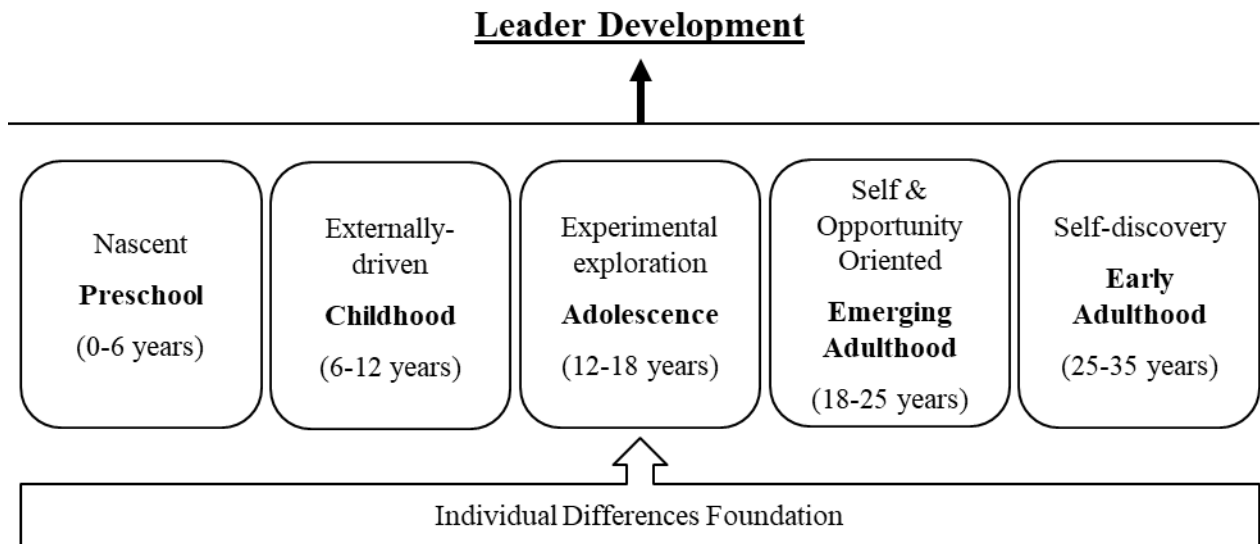opportunity for an individual's development as a leader.

Leader Development

Figure 2.   Leader Development through Experiential Windows

The initial stage is defined as "Preschool," which is both the nascent period of life (ages 0-6 years old) and the foundational period for subsequent stages. During this stage, attachment relationships with caregivers (typically parents) are formed (Erikson & Erikson, 1998), and play experiences developed (Brownell & Brown, 1992), both of which have critical influences on future lifelong development as a leader (Mack et al., 2011; Day & Dragoni, 2015). The second stage is "Childhood" (ages 6-12 years old), during which children enter elementary school and become involved in various social, academic, and sports activities, thereby starting to develop communication, cognitive, and interpersonal abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Sun et al., 2017) – while still dependent on external influencers such as parents, teachers, and other caregivers to provide them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The third stage is "Adolescence" (ages 12-18 years old), an important period of transition through middle school and high school during which individuals develop a sense of who they are and how they view

the world (Erikson, 1968; Erikson & Erikson, 1998), exploring and experimenting with their leadership skills both independently as well as with peers and adults. The fourth stage is "Emerging Adulthood" (ages 18-25 years old), during which individuals may experience university and, after graduation, typically begin their professional careers or pursue further education at a postgraduate level. During this period, individuals gain exposure to diverse opportunities for developing their leadership skills (Murphy, 2011), and to engage in various new challenges and experiences which help nurture their sense of self for further growth and achievement (Perreault, Cohen, & Blanchard, 2016). The last stage in the model is "Early Adulthood" (ages 25-35 years old), during which individuals develop their foundational careers. Some may experience major life events such as marriage and parenthood during this period, while being exposed to various new styles of communication, engagement, and leadership in the workplace (Gray & Bishop, 2009).

Big Five Personality Test

As an additional point of reference, we requested each interview participant to take the Big Five Personality Test (John et al. 1991), which breaks down and describes specific personality traits in terms of numerical scores. The individual scores can easily be compared with global sample averages. The five broad personality traits described by the test are: extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. The test was administered online, and data was collected anonymously.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

We interviewed the nine global leaders during the period of March 3rd to April 7th, 2020. The average duration of each interview was approximately two hours. The profiles of the nine interviewees are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1.   Interviewee Profiles

	AGE	CAREER SUMMARY
A	40's	Spent initial 10 years of career in sales roles with a local Japanese company. Then joined a global company, becoming Sales Director for Japan. Moved to another global company as Japan General Manager during early forties.
B	50's	Spent first 20 years of career with a global Japanese company, working in Japan and internationally. Then held senior leadesrhip roles with four global companies with operations in Japan. Became President & Representative Director of a global company in Japan during fifties.
C	40's	Spent first 15 years of career with a global Japanese company, working in international roles. Then moved to a global company in Japan, and was promoted to General Manager during late thirties.
D	50's	Spent first 30 years of career with a global Japanese company, working in Japan and internationally. Was promoted to President of a subsidiary company in Japan when 32 years old, and subsequently held several roles in general manageent in Japan and internationally. Became President & CEO for the Japan subsidiary of a US-based company during fifties.
E	50's	Began career with a local Japanese company. Then held roles of increasing seniority with global companies in Japan for the next 15 years. Became Japan Country Manager for a global company during early forties. After that, became CEO of a local Japanese company.
F	40's	Began career in local politics prior to starting business career in sales for a global company in Japan for 5 years. Held roles of increasing seniority with several other global companies in Japan, before becoming Japan General Manager with a global company during early forties. Subsequently, became Japan Managing Director for another global company with operations in Japan during late forties.
G	40's	Spent first 10 years of career with a local Japanese company. Moved to the Japan subsidiary of a global company and held roles of increasing seniority, before transitioning to the Japan operations of another global company as Country Director during early forties. Subsequently, moved to the Japan subsidiary of another global company as Country Director.
H	50's	Began career working with global companies in Japan, before moving to a local Japanese company. Then joined a global subsidiary of a Japanese company, prior to holding Japan and international Country Manager roles for a global company during thirties. Subsequently, held Japan Country Manager roles for three other global companies.
I	50's	Spent first 5 years of career with a local Japanese company. Then worked internationally and in Japan for four global companies in roles of increasing seniority for the next 20 years, becoming North Asia General Manager for a global company during early forties.

We conducted semi-structured interviews based on each window in the analytical framework as described in Figure 2. Interviewees talked about major life events and related experiences during each stage: Preschool, Childhood, Adolescence, Emerging Adulthood, and Early Adulthood.

While we collated varying and distinctive life stories and sets of experiences from the nine interviewees, the interview data were generalized, summarized, and categorized as shown in Table 2, in order to identify the experiences common to all participants – experiences which may, potentially, be critical in terms of contributing to their journey of becoming global leaders later on in life.

TABLE 2.   Summary of Interviews

TOPIC	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	O's
Preschool (0-6 years)										
Raised in Japan only during preschool (a)	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Spent pre-school overseas	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Attended international preschool	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Spoke English from childhood out of necessity	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Raised in urban areas during childhood	X	X	o	o	X	X	X	X	X	2
Raised in rural areas during childhood	o	o	X	X	o	o	o	o	o	7
Exposure to global influences from during pre-school via family/household	o	X	o	X	X	X	o	o	X	4
Recalls self-driven curiousity about world outside Japan from preschool age	X	o	X	X	X	X	o	o	o	2
Regular exposure to adults / society from preschool age	o	X	X	X	o	o	X	o	X	4
Childhood (6-12 years)										
Attended public elementary school in Japan (b)	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Attended private elementary school in Japan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Attended international elementary school in Japan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Attended elementary school overseas	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Exposure to/stimulus from global influences during elementary school years	X	o	o	X	o	X	o	o	X	5
Recalls self-driven curiousity about world outside of Japan from elementary school	X	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	X	5
Participated in competitive sports during elementary school (c)	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Excelled in sports during elementary school	X	X	X	o	X	o	o	o	o	5
Learned martial arts during elementary school	X	o	X	o	o	X	X	X	o	4
Experience gaining confidence through sports during elementary school	X	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	7
Leadership or "people coordination" experience at elementary school	o	o	X	o	X	o	o	o	o	7
Rated as "yutosei" (elite student) with top grades at elementary school	X	X	X	X	X	X	o	o	X	2
Nominated as "seito kaicho" (year captain) during elementary school	X	X	X	X	X	X	o	X	X	1
Participated in elementary school clubs / circles	o	X	X	o	X	o	X	o	X	4
Significant time spent in activities outside/ after school	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	7
Regular exposure to adults / society from elementary school age	o	o	X	o	X	o	o	X	X	5
Wide range of curiosity/interests from elementary school age	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	7
Experienced / overcame adversity during elementary school years	o	X	o	X	o	o	o	X	o	5
Recalls studying very hard at elementary school	X	X	X	X	X	X	o	X	X	1
Recalls getting mediochre grades at elementary school	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	o	o	7
Strong pressure from mother/father to perform academically during childhood	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	o	o	2
Liberal parenting style during elementary school (d)	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Developed ambition to become a future leader during elementary school	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Adolescence (12-18 years)										
Spent adolescence in Japan only	X	o	o	X	X	o	X	o	o	6
Spent adolescence in Japan and overseas	o	X	o	X	X	X	o	X	X	3
Recalls needing to overcome tough/adverse experiences as a teenager	o	X	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	7
Describes self as sociable / outgoing during adolescence	X	o	X	o	X	o	o	o	o	6
Describes self as more focused on own life/activities during adolescence	X	X	o	X	o	X	o	o	X	3
"Yutosei" (elite student) during middle school	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
"Yutosei" (elite student) during high school	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Played roled as "seito kaicho" (class captain) during middle school	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Played roled as "seito kaicho" (class captain) during high school	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Actively participated in sports during middle school years (e)	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Actively participated in sports during high school years (f)	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Actively participated in music activities during middle school years	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Actively participated in music activities during high school years	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Father was a business leader / executive / company president	o	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	X	7
Regular exposure to adults / society during adolescense	o	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	X	7
Recalls vivid experiences of gaining independence during adolescence	X	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	7
Rebellious / non-confirmist at school	X	X	o	o	o	X	o	o	o	5
Developed ambition to become a future leader during adolescence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Emerging Adulthood (18-25 years)										
Attended university in Japan (undergrad)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	o	7
Attended top flight (equiv. Ivy League) university in Japan	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	X	7
Attended university overseas (undergrad)	X	X	X	X	X	X	o	X	X	1
Learning English out of necessity due to move overseas	o	X	X	X	o	X	X	o	X	3
Started to learn English seriously from university period onwards only	X	X	X	o	X	o	X	X	o	3
Actively participated in sports during university years	o	X	X	X	X	o	X	o	X	1
Actively participated in music activities during university years	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Existence of mentor / aspirational type figures while at university	X	X	X	o	X	X	o	X	o	4
Gained a clear idea of desired career aspirations at university	X	o	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	2
Developed ambition to become a leader during university	X	o	X	X	X	o	X	X	X	2
Focused on academic work/activities at university	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Gained leadership / "coordination" experience at university	o	o	o	o	X	o	X	o	o	6
Gained a wide range of experiences in extra-curricular activities (vs. academic) at university (g)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	8
Had gained direct experiences of the world outside Japan by the time of university graduation (h)	o	o	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	8
Regular exposure to adults / society during university	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	5
Spent time traveling outside Japan during university	X	X	X	o	o	o	X	o	o	4
Life changing experience of self-discovery / development at university (i)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	9
Early Adulthood (25-35 years)										
Started career at Japanese company in Japan	o	o	o	o	o	X	o	X	o	7
Started career at foreign capital company in Japan	X	X	X	X	X	o	X	o	X	2
Gained a wide range of professional experiences during first 10 years of career (j)	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Started career doing something very different to what they are doing now (k)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	9
Experienced work overseas during first ten years of career	X	o	o	o	o	X	X	X	o	5
Collaborated with global colleagues/companies/customers during first 10 years of career (l)	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	8
Experienced more than 1 company during first 10 years of career	o	X	X	X	o	o	X	o	o	5
Attended MBA program as result of own initiative	X	X	o	X	o	X	X	o	o	4
MBA sponsored by company	X	o	X	o	X	X	o	X	X	3
Highly active in life outside career / the workplace (hobbies, sports, NGOs etc.)	X	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Experienced overcoming significant failures/challenges/adversity during this period (m)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	9
Talks about importance of setting and achieving goals early on	o	o	o	o	o	o	X	o	o	7
Developed ambition to become a CEO / GM during first ten years of career	X	o	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1
Ambition to become a leader came only following initial 10 years of career (n)	o	X	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	8

In order to achieve a systematic evaluation of the data, as well as to minimize subjective bias in our evaluation, the number of "O"s was merely counted, and items with eight or nine "O"s were selected and highlighted as common experiences (as shown in Table 2).

For the "Preschool" stage, we identified one item, "Raised in Japan only during preschool" (a). For the "Childhood" stage, three items were found in common: "Attended public elementary school in Japan" (b), "Participated in competitive sports during elementary school" (c), and "Liberal parenting style during elementary school" (d). Two items were found in common for the "Adolescent" stage: "Actively participated in sports during middle school years" (e), and "Actively participated in sports during high school years" (f). Common items for the "Emerging Adulthood" stage were identified as: "Gained a wide range of experiences in extra-curricular (vs. academic) activities at university" (g), "Had gained direct experiences of the world outside Japan by the time of university graduation" (h), and "Life changing experience of self-discovery / development at university" (i). There were six items in common for the "Early Adulthood" stage: "Gained a wide range of professional experiences during first 10 years of career" (j), "Started career doing something very different to what they are doing now" (k), "Collaborated with global colleagues/companies/customers during first 10 years of career" (l), "Experienced overcoming significant failures/challenges/adversity during this period" (m), and "Ambition to become a leader came only following initial 10 years of career" (n).

The common experiences as identified above were further generalized and summarized into four categories: 1) Participated in competitive sports during Childhood and Adolescence; 2) Gained an interest in, or exposure to, the world outside Japan by Emerging Adulthood; 3) Engaged in a wide range of extracurricular activities during Emerging Adulthood; and 4. Gained a wide range of experiences during early career.

Participated in Competitive Sports during Childhood and Adolescence

Eight out of nine samples participated in competitive sports during elementary school (c), middle school (e), and high school (f). The type of sports included both team sports such as softball and volleyball, and individual sports such as swimming and *kendo*. Almost all interviewees explicitly stated that they had gained a sense of self-confidence through their participation in sports. [F] said, "I started swimming at a swimming club early on in elementary school to improve my health, and went on to become one of the top swimmers for the club nationwide. I realized it was possible to achieve something if you try your hardest with a clear goal in front of you, and gained confidence through achieving that goal." [G] played softball during elementary school, and said, "When I moved to the United States, softball helped me to be accepted by new friends locally; it worked as a universal language." [E] started learning martial arts when 12 years old and said, "I could protect myself, and started to grow in confidence as a result. Also, as I was the youngest member of the *dojo*, the older boys took me under their wing, which opened my eyes to new aspects of society from a young age."

[C] was only the exception. [C] did not participate in sports, but played the violin from childhood onwards and stated, "Violin worked as a communication tool that helped me be accepted by new friends," which is similar to [G]'s experience with softball.

It is noteworthy that the majority of interviewees did not continue to participate in sports beyond their high school years, investing their time into other activities instead from university onwards. Only [A] actively participated in sports (American football) at university.

Gained an Interest in, or Exposure to, the World outside Japan by Emerging Adulthood

Eight out of nine samples had gained direct experience of the world outside Japan by the time of university graduation (h). [C] gained global exposure during Preschool through attending kindergarten overseas. [B], [E], [G] and [H] experienced direct exposure to, or received strong

stimulus from, global influences during their elementary school years. [B] recalls becoming curious about the world outside Japan during Childhood, when one of his close friends moved to Los Angeles in the United States. [B]'s family were supportive of his interest and allowed him various experiences such as going on ski trips with US military personnel. [E] stated, "I didn't like group activities much, so frequently went to the school library to be by myself. I became fascinated with a photography book depicting scenery from around the world, and asked my parents to buy the same book so I could read it at home. At middle school, I studied English very hard, as I saw it as my pathway to being able to experience the world beyond Japan." [H] said, "Although I grew up in a typical rural area of Japan, my parents were constantly hosting exchange students in our house, mostly from Australia, so I could practice my English. There were also books on all different subjects from around the world lying about the house. I read them avidly, and became fascinated with other countries from a very young age. As a teenager, as I still couldn't visit those countries physically, I joined an international pen pal association and started writing to people from all around the world instead. Eventually, I had 100 regular pen pals, and became the association's representative for Japan. When I was 15, I made my parents agree to allow me to travel around Europe by myself for 3 months during the summer holidays, which I did again when I was 16. The experience made me more excited about exploring the world, and I eventually decided to apply to university overseas."

Engaged in a Wide Range of Extracurricular Activities during Emerging Adulthood

Eight out of nine samples gained a wide range of experiences through their pursuit of various extracurricular activities during university (g). Our defining criteria for "extracurricular" is activities that are voluntary (i.e., not required for school) and involve some sort of structure (i.e., participation within a system involving constraints, rules, and goals). Both [B] and [D] were top-ranking members of inter-college social networking groups. Both said they greatly enjoyed

the experience of building relationships with a diversity of students from different universities. [C] became the top representative of a volunteer group supporting the needs of high school students in Japan and said, "It was just like running a small company. I enjoyed learning how to empower staff members, doing public relations, and solving financial issues." Other interviewees spent a significant portion of their university years planning for and going on international backpacking trips [E] and doing a variety of part-time jobs [G].

Many interviewees talked about extra-curricular pursuits during their university years as being life-changing experiences of self-discovery or self-development (i). For example, [E] recounted an experience of becoming ill while backpacking around India and being taken care of by strangers, which "changed my paradigm and made me feel connected to others around the world." [H] said that, "More than campus life, the most life-changing experiences for me at university were exchange programs I did in France and Spain. I lost sight of the direction I wanted to take halfway through my studies and dropped out for a year to teach English to adults, before deciding to return to take my final year and graduate."

Gained a Wide Range of Experiences during Early Career

Eight out of nine samples gained a wide range of experiences during the first 10 years of their career (j), and interestingly, all nine interviewees began their careers doing something very different to what they are doing now (k). [F]'s career started as a secretary for a politician, dreaming of becoming the mayor of his hometown: "I learned a great deal about human beings in general, and about myself, during that early experience. I eventually needed to give up on my dream of getting into politics for family reasons, and went into the business world instead. I committed to myself then that I would make every effort possible to become "number one" in anything I tried my hand at." [G] had a clear strategy for gaining a broad range of professional experience from early on, and after graduating from university, decided to join a major Japanese

manufacturer well-known for providing a variety of different roles for new graduates. [G] went on to experience sales, licensing, acquisitions, supply, distribution, and a venture start-up project, before being sponsored for an MBA program within the first ten years of joining the company. "Many Japanese companies develop fresh employees by giving them a variety of business experiences early on. My company put me into many different roles, which enabled me to develop my foundational business competencies." Both [E] and [H] worked with three different Japanese and foreign-affiliated companies, in addition to studying for an MBA internationally, during the first decade of their careers. [H] described the accumulation of these various early professional experiences as the "magma" for going on to become a global leader later on.

Other common experiences among interviewees during Early Adulthood are all closely related to this point to a certain degree – i.e., Collaborated with global colleagues/companies/customers during first 10 years (l), and Experienced overcoming significant failures/challenges/adversity during this period (m).

Other Common Experiences

Other items found to be in common among our interview sample include being raised in Japan only during Preschool (a); attending public elementary school in Japan (b); and being raised under a liberal parenting style (d) during Childhood. Additionally, all interviewees said they realized their ambitions to become a leader only after the initial 10 years of their career (n).

Big Five Personality Test

We anonymously collected Big Five Personality Test (BFPT) data from eight out of nine interviewees. Given that personality considerations are outside the direct scope of this particular research, the data was collected as an additional reference point to scan for any identifiable tendencies among the group. A summary of the personality test data is shown in Table 3, which

demonstrates some clear tendencies when compared to the average global population scores made public on the online survey website (https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test).

Table 3.   Result of Big Five Personality Test

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
	69	52	87.5	67	2
	96	71	81	62.5	10
	83	62.5	42	83	37.5
	75	75	48	77	40
	79	94	77	56	19
	67	71	75	71	46
	100	83	37.5	83	0
	65	90	50	62.5	6
Average Group Scores	**79**	**75**	**62**	**70**	**20**
Average Population Scores	**58**	**55**	**51**	**63**	**54**
Difference	**21**	**20**	**11**	**7**	**-34**

Shade: above average population scores

All of our samples showed higher scores in "openness," which describes an individual's tendency to think in complex and abstract ways. Our samples are also more conscientious than average, meaning they tend to be persistent and determined in achieving their goals. It was clear that our samples are less neurotic than average. According to the definition in the BFPT, this indicates high levels of resilience and a tendency to feel difficult feelings such as anger, sadness, anxiety, and self-consciousness less frequently than others. Our samples have mixed scores for Extraversion (i.e., Outgoing, energetic, and friendly by nature) and Agreeableness (highly agreeable people are concerned with getting along with others, while those low in agreeableness are concerned with serving their own interests). Some studies suggest that a high level of Extraversion is an important factor for successful leadership (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2004; Bartone et al., 2009; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009). However, the data from this initial study is not as conclusive in this respect.

Study Hypotheses

Based on an analysis of our interview data, we derived four hypotheses to our research question: What are the common early life and early career experiences among Japanese global leaders at foreign-affiliated companies?

Hypothesis 1: Participation in competitive sports during Childhood and Adolescence contributes to emergence as a global leader later in life.

Participation in youth sports during Childhood and Adolescence is a meaningful experience that can be associated with emergence in global leadership roles later in life. Most individuals in our sample group who went on to become leaders of global companies in Japan experienced competitive sports during their childhood or adolescent years, and reported they grew in self-confidence and self-belief early on in life as a result of participation in these activities.

This is consistent with findings from previous studies correlating participation in youth sports early on in life with effectiveness in leadership roles as an adult (Atwater et al., 1999). Kniffin, Wansink, and Shimizu (2015) found that individuals who participated in competitive or structured sports during adolescence displayed significantly more leadership skills than did non-athletes. Larson et al. (2006) found that children who participated in youth sports programs showed significantly higher rates of initiative – the ability to be motivated from within to direct attention and effort towards a challenging goal, which is also a core requirement for other aspects of positive leadership development (Larson, 2000) – in addition to capacity for emotional regulation and positive teamwork experiences. Another study posited that skills developed through youth sports are transferrable to leadership situations later in life including visioning, self-efficacy, focus on winning, competitiveness, task and ego-orientation, and enjoyment of flow experience (Chelladurai & Packianathan, 2012).

Hypothesis 2: Global exposure during early life stages (Preschool through Emerging Adulthood) contributes to emergence as a global leader later in life.

Exposure to the world outside Japan during Childhood or Adolescence can be correlated with decisions to pursue professional opportunities related to global leadership, in addition to the early development of the cross-cultural skills necessary for effectiveness in leadership roles with global companies.

This is consistent with several previous studies. Caligiuri & Tarique (2009) suggest that foundational global leader development may occur through intercultural experiences during childhood or young adulthood, as learning the nuances of behavior expected in other cultures compared to our own help us to understand our own cultural values and assumptions, thereby building the intercultural competencies which are key for success in global leadership activities. Additionally, recent research into Adult Third Culture Kids or "ATCKs" (e.g., Burrus, 2006; Cho, 2009; Lam & Selmer, 2004; Solomon, 1994) – individuals who spend portions of their formative or developmental years in cultures other than their parents' or the culture of the country of their nationality – suggests that their early life experiences help to foster a global mindset, which is a key precursor to effectiveness as a global leader, from early on (Lam & Selmer, 2004; Cho, 2009), and that ATCKs are motivated to work and lead cross-culturally and in foreign countries (Stokke, 2013). Furthermore, a study by Konyu-Fogel (2011) found a positive correlation between global mindset and leadership in general, concluding that "global mindset improves leadership behavior critical to organizational performance."

Hypothesis 3: Experiencing a wide breadth of extracurricular activities during Emerging Adulthood contributes to emergence as a global leader later in life.

Participation in a wide range of extracurricular activities such as student networking groups, part-time employment, or organized travel experiences etc. during adolescence and university

exposed individuals in our sample group to important experiences not available through regular academic curriculums, which they were able to apply to their professional careers later on.

This is consistent with previous research. Murphy (2011) found that such activities enable social learning about leadership among adolescents, and provide scenarios in which they can utilize leadership-related skills in real-world situations and thereby develop their leadership potential. In other studies, participation in extracurricular activities and community youth organizations has been correlated with higher self-esteem, feelings of control over one's life, lower rates of delinquency, and higher educational aspirations and achievement (Holland & Andre, 1987; Larson, 1994). Additionally, longitudinal data from a sample of 10,000 youths found significant relationships between participation in extracurricular and community activities and positive changes in self-concept, schoolwork, and educational and occupational aspirations (Marsh, 1992).

Hypothesis 4: Exposure to a wide range of experiences during early career (Emerging and Early Adulthood stages) contributes to emergence as a global leader later in life.

Individuals in our interviewee group of global business leaders in Japan developed a significant breadth – or range – of professional experience during the first 10 years of their careers. This is particularly true when compared with the typical full-time salaried employee in Japan – where the country's celebrated lifetime employment system – under which employees join a company and remain with the same company until they retire – "appears to be still well and alive" (Kambayashi & Kato, 2017). In fact, it is worthwhile noting that all of our participants began their career doing something very different to what they are doing now (k).

This is consistent with a body of research suggesting that experiencing a wide range of challenges at work is pivotal to developing leadership skills (e.g. McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; McCauley, 2001; Robinson & Wick, 1992), and that the need to deal with the

complex, unfamiliar, and unpredictable nature of such challenges (Ohlott, Chrobot-Mason, & Dalton, 2004) facilitates the development of strategic, cognitive, and behavioral leadership skills (Day et al., 2009; DeRue & Wellman, 2009).

Also noteworthy is recent work by Epstein (2019), who suggests that the most successful professionals who rise to the top of their respective disciplines are not specialists, but generalists who accumulate a wide range of experiences early on, are exposed to multiple domains, have diverse interests, and often find their path later in life. Epstein also suggests that such individuals are more creative, more agile, and able to make connections which their more specialized peers are not able to see.

CONCLUSION

This paper has four major contributions to the existing literature. First, it expands on existing research into Japanese global leaders. There is currently a paucity of studies focusing on leader development among Japanese executives, especially executives at global companies in Japan. This study explores the development of Japanese leaders who are, or have been, employed as the most senior representative of global companies with operations in Japan. Perhaps in light of the challenges of gathering such global leaders for this kind of research, to best of our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind.

Second, we gathered insights and information from our study participants in-person via conducting face-to-face interviews, as opposed to doing so remotely via research surveys. During the interview sessions, participants recalled and discussed their personal life experiences with emotion and in detail. On account of the interactive interview environment, we were able to probe more deeply into some of the experiences they described, and to encourage them to expand on specific points when talking about other relevant topics. This allowed us to gain a depth of insight which would be challenging to achieve through survey-based research.

Third, the findings from our study may be important points of interest for Japanese youth who aspire to become global leaders in the future. Our interview participants were not "born leaders," nor were they raised in exceptional environments in order to become global leaders. They all made clear choices and decisions during the course of their early life stages, and sought out specific experiences and learning opportunities which may have contributed to their development as global leaders later on. Such choices, decisions, experiences, and opportunities are open to anyone, which implies that all young people in Japan should have the potential to become future global leaders, if they so decide.

Fourth, findings from our study may be helpful for companies in Japan who are looking to hire global leaders for their businesses. "Scanning" for evidence of participation in competitive youth sports (or similar activities), global exposure early in life, participation in extracurricular activities during early adulthood, and gaining a wide range of experience in one's early career during company interview processes, may contribute to more effective hiring decisions when looking for Japanese executives, or potential future managers, who are truly capable of leading in global environments.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge some of the limitations of this study, and to discuss our direction for future research. First, our study has a limited sample size, with only nine interview participants. This reflects the early stage of our research, and as such, this study is a preliminary summary of the initial phase of an ongoing research initiative. We are currently conducting further interviews in order to derive more comprehensive hypotheses. Additionally, the interviews we conducted were retrospective by nature. Discussions were reliant upon participants' subjective recollection of past events, and thereby subject to recall bias. While efforts were made to reduce such bias by adopting a semi-structured interview approach, as well as ensuring our participants were not aware of any study hypotheses being developed, it is not possible to completely eliminate this effect.

For our future research, we will increase our study's sample size in order to derive more robust hypotheses, as well as attempt to probe more deeply into the causal relationships and interplay taking place between common early life and early career experiences, relevant environmental and contextual factors, and emergence as Japanese global leaders.

NOTES

[1] Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity
[2] Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

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